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AUTHOR	Dalrymple, Nancy
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ABSTRACT

This booklet focuses on teaching individuals with autism some social rules and routines that can be used in a variety of situations and applied across settings. It addresses the selection of interpersonal skill objectives, motivating the person with autism to try to interact, teaching ways to express feelings, helping peers to interact with friends who have autism, finding supportive peers, and providing information and support to peers. The booklet presents sample interpersonal skill objectives and teaching procedures to achieve those objectives. These skills include tolerating being in a group, participating in a group, approaching people, identifying feelings, respecting others' needs, pleasant touching, handling teasing, reinforcing friendly behavior, making friends, giving another person time and space, and understanding the perspective of others. For each skill, the booklet provides a rationale, lead-up activities, teaching procedures, associated objectives, plan for motivation, and precautions. (JDD)

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The University Affiliated Program of Indiana

Social Series

Some Interpersonal Social Skill Objectives and Teaching Strategies for People with Autism

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by

Nancy Dalrymple

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Difficulties People with Autism Experience In Interpersonal Relationships

Often, people with autism do not fully receive and process the social messages from others that would help them behave in socially appropriate ways. They are often described as being odd, strange or out of sync. They express a desire to be with others but their behavior is often so inappropriate that they are either rejected or ignored. Frustration may be experienced by individuals with autism as they become aware that they are different and as they feel left out of the usual social experiences.

Social interaction requires complex, ever-changing skills. Personal interaction is often unpredictable, depending on an inter-relationship of complex variables such as personality, mood, and setting. There are very few concrete social rules; but rather, many subtle and elusive rules that guide social conventions. These characteristics of social interaction make success difficult, especially for a person with autism. Therefore it is important to create some structure and certainty and to teach rules and routines that can be used in a variety of situations and applied across settings.

Selection of Interpersonal Skill Objectives

Assessment of the person's existing interaction skills as well as the next skills to be taught requires detective work and careful analysis of the learning sequence. Often the person's inappropriate behavior becomes the focus of attention, rather than looking for the function of the behavior to determine what skills need to be taught and how to teach them.

Strategies must be proactive and aimed at helping the person learn alternative, positive interaction behaviors, rather than simply reacting to negative behavior with prohibition. For example, if Milt is aggressing toward his classmates during recess, observe carefully to see why. What is Milt getting out of this interaction? Is he anxious and upset in this setting? Does he really want to interact or to communicate something? Can he

learn to do this in a more positive way? Objectives that focus on social communication and on cooperative play may be important for Milt. In another example, when Sally screams at the teacher upon arriving at school, the antecedent must be tracked down to determine what caused her frustration. Was it the bus ride? Was she hurried this morning? Does she have to use the bathroom? Does she wonder what she will do today? Each person with autism will have her own particular problems relating to others. Interpersonal skill objectives must address each particular issue in a functional, practical way. Objectives that can be generalized and supported across environments should be chosen.

Setting the Stage

The learner with autism will need to develop a feeling of safety, security, and trust in the people around him. This may take a good deal of time, but there is no shortcoming this process. Only after this need is met can the individual begin to reach out and respond to others in positive ways. Initially, the person may have to depend heavily on a few people he trusts as he begins interacting with more of those around him.

Successful interaction helps build a positive self-concept. The learner must hear strong genuine messages that he is a worthwhile, likable, competent, and important human being. Since the person with autism can seldom articulate how he feels about himself, we may not attend closely enough to his self-concept. However, the perceptive observer will discover that how the student feels about himself is revealed in his behaviors and his willingness to risk social interaction with others.

Motivating the Person with Autism to Try to Interact

Because people with autism sometimes appear not to care, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that they do, for the most part, want to interact with others around them. This impression of indifference usually stems from the person's history of failure

in past interactions. He may have received many negative messages that he is wrong, bad, and very different from others as a response to his interaction attempts. Isolation, bizarre, negative, or even aggressive interactions are all behaviors persons with autism learn in order to cope or to get what they want and need in the only way they know how.

Individuals with autism often are unmotivated to interact, or to show or receive affection. After a trusting relationship has been established with another person , that person can and will need to insist on social responses and set clear expectations. These rules and expectations can be taught through simple, clear statements. An individual can be instructed, "Use your loud voice so I can hear you" or "I said, 'Hi'. Your turn to answer." These statements must be made firmly, but never in a negative or sarcastic way. At the same time, it is essential that all appropriate interaction attempts be reinforced, and sufficient attention and feedback be given. Everyone in the learner's environment will need to be as consistent as possible with expectations and reinforcement if the person is going to learn to like interacting. In addition, natural situations should continually be "arranged" so the learner practices interacting acceptably with others to get what she wants. For example, a friend refuses to move when the learner shoves, but moves immediately if the learner says or gestures, "Please move," or "Go away." Modeling appropriate social interactions, providing pictured and written cue cards, and practicing with supportive people sharing the social experience are all helpful.

Expectations depend on the student. With one, pointing to get what he wants is reinforced; for another, asking for something in a polite tone before getting it becomes the expectation. Pointing to a picture on a communication board may be the goal for another.

Teaching Expression of Feelings

Learners with autism will always need an outlet for expressing their feelings. Acceptable outlets usually must be taught. These can include shouting, punching a pillow, stamping feet or

just telling somebody "Stop it!" or "I'm mad!" There will be times when adults and peers must be willing to accept and even encourage angry and negative talking and actions from the person with autism, as an alternative to destructive or aggressive behavior. At times, these expressions may be hard for others to accept.

In addition to teaching expressions of feelings in the actual situations where they occur, it is often necessary to teach the labeling of feelings as well. This can be done in a lesson format, where teachers label photos of facial expressions, then model these expressions and both talk about and act out situations that make people feel a certain way. Videotapes sometimes help demonstrate appropriate expression of feelings. At the same time, the labeling of feelings must be carried over into actual situations by helping the learner label her own feelings when they occur, and by adults modeling expression of their own feelings in certain situations.

Individuals will also probably need to learn to express positive feelings, such as, "I like Randy, " or "I'm happy," or "This is fun." Such expressions are ways we all get positive reactions from others and can be modeled.

Helping Peers to Interact with Friends with Autism

People with autism can benefit considerably from sociable peer models. Research has shown that children with autism learn a discrimination task more quickly with a peer modeling the skill, in addition to direct instruction. Peers have been used successfully as models for preschoolers through adults, but peers often need information and support. It may be particularly difficult to teach social interaction skills to people with autism when they are grouped only with other individuals with disabilities who may not initiate or respond appropriately to sociable behavior.

A devaluing message is likely to be conveyed to individuals with handicaps when they are placed in segregated groups that identify them as "different." Also being grouped only with people with handicaps may give a negative message to the

learner about himself. In contrast, being around peers who are not handicapped suggests that the individual is a competent person who can interact with others. This message can enhance self- concept. However, it is also known that interaction with peers usually does not "just happen" for individuals with autism. If they are not prepared and supported, they may react negatively. If peers don't have information and support, they find it difficult to keep trying to interact with the learner. "Spontaneous integration" without planning and preparation often results in students being teased, ridiculed, and left out by others. Special support by adults and advocates is almost always necessary. Brothers and sisters of people with autism also need extra information and support to help them and their friends be effective advocates and friends.

Finding Supportive Peers

The following characteristics should be considered when selecting peers:

- Interest and motivation will probably determine the success of the relationship more than anything else. Matched interests, shared strengths, and special recognition and credit are all important; but most of all, the peers need to want to be involved.
- Maturity and self-confidence help ensure a stable relationship. Peers who are socially insecure themselves may be more intolerant of the person's odd behaviors and overly anxious about what others think of them when they are with the individual with autism. Peers need to be confident enough to initiate interaction, since the person with autism probably will not initiate in a socially recognizable way.
- Leadership qualities help the peer expand the circle of interaction. A peer with high status among her peers can be extremely valuable in modeling a positive, accepting attitude which others in the group will follow.

It usually works best to include more than one peer in the learner's primary group. It also helps if the whole group is well informed about the learner. It seems that the more the peers interact and share experiences and feel personally responsible, the more successful the integration. Peer advocates often do the

best job of transferring information to their peer group. Multiple peers also help the person with autism generalize across people and lessens the dependency on one person.

Providing Information and Support to Peers

It is important to help peers understand and work with individuals with autism. First, provide some general information about the disability of autism. Be sure to adjust the information to the level and needs of the group. Find out what the group already knows. They may have fears or misconceptions; be alert to these and give peers plenty of opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas. Tactfully correct any misconceptions. Next, provide information about the individual with autism. This should include:

- Language skills-limitations; what she understands, what she can express, effective ways of talking to her.
- Activity skills-interests; how well she can do activities peers are doing, what kind of help she may need from peers, ideas for interactive games and other activities peers may enjoy together.
- Typical behaviors-fears; how the learner responds to noise, confusion, lack of understanding, new people and places, possible challenging behaviors.

An adult will need to be sensitive to times when too much preparation may make peers unduly wary of the person with autism or cause them unnecessarily to change their normal ways of interacting. An adult leader who knows the peer or peer group will be able to offer valuable guidance in this matter.

Once the person with autism begins participating with peers, the adult can provide support by modeling interactions and by holding regular " debriefing" sessions where peers discuss successes, reactions, or problems. Some peers have expressed frustration at the great effort it takes to maintain interactions with individuals with autism. They have also listed mannerisms which particularly bother them, such as (1) continued repetition of phrases, (2) talking loudly, (3) insisting on having their own way, and (4) odd movements. At the same time, peers are often quite understanding and perceptive of the person's unique char-

acteristics. Peers need to know that it is all right to be straightforward with the person, explaining better ways to interact, writing down choices, or being directive when needed. For example, it may be effective for the peer to say, "I don't like it when you eat so sloppily," or even, "If you want to play, sit down and wait your turn." "Please, use your fork and napkin." If the peer is not able to express how he feels, he may begin to avoid the person with autism or always depend on adults to modify the person's behaviors.

Adults need to be creative in coming up with a variety of ways to involve sociable peers in the regular routine of the person with autism. Peers can be tutors or can model skills. In some social situations it may be better if the peer's role is simply that of friend and companion. It may be difficult for a peer to fill both roles. Take care that peers are not placed in the role of teachers to direct the person with autism in every mainstreaming situation. Instead, emphasize the value of peers simply sharing experiences for fun and relaxation.

Information on facilitating peer interaction with individuals with autism is beginning to emerge. More study and documentation needs to be done before we can predict what kind of shared experiences will benefit both individuals with autism and their peers. Probably, the process and outcomes will be quite individual. However, including people with autism in activities, taking time to explain and demonstrate, and being aware of their needs for special support are all part of successful interactions in social relationships.

Sample Objectives for Interpersonal Skills

The following are representative samples of interpersonal skill objectives which might be included in an individual program plan. Teaching procedures follow.

GOAL: WILL INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Sample Objectives

* Will tolerate being in a group of sociable peers.
* Will participate in a familiar small group activity with sociable peers.
* Will approach people without touching, stand at an arm's length away, then initiate a learned greeting gesture.
* Will identify a variety of feelings of himself and others and apply these in natural situations when they occur with specific cues. Will respect other people's needs, rights, and desires when asked.
* Will use touching, hugging, and cuddling in appropriate ways to interact with others.
* Will effectively ignore teasing behavior of peers.
* Will effectively reinforce friendly behavior of peers and adults.
* Will use four basic skills necessary to have a friendship with a sociable peer close in age.
* Will accept regular times he has someone's full attention and accept times to do something else and leave others alone for ___ minutes.
* Will negotiate choices with one or more peers with supports.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILL

SKILL AREA: GROUP INTERACTION

SKILL: TOLERATING BEING IN A GROUP

OBJECTIVE: **Will tolerate being in a group of sociable peers.**

RATIONALE: Some persons with autism have problems tolerating nearness of peers and have little concept of themselves as a member of a group. They may need to be desensitized to groups in order to avoid inappropriate behaviors which may result from noise, being closed in, having to share attention, or being in close contact with others.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Learners may need to do one-to-one activities initially until they have learned to trust the environment and the people in it.
- When the learner is doing a one-to-one activity successfully, invite a peer to sit at the same table and participate beside the student. Next, add more peers. Gradually move peers closer to the student.
- Practice recognizing completion of a time period for familiar activities, such as "paint for five minutes." Teach the learner to match a clock set at the completion time to a real clock. When clocks match,the activity is over. Or, use a timer or other means to denote time passage or amount to be done.

Teaching Procedures:

Select a small group (2-3 students) activity that is scheduled in the daily routine. If possible, select a group activity that may be potentially motivating for the learner. The group activity might be art, music, story listening, snack, computer, cooking, or a similar activity that does not require much waiting, response, or problem-solving.

After the learner is familiar with the environment and people around her, begin preparation. Tell the learner beforehand "Tomorrow you will watch the music group." Put the music group into the individual's daily sequence of activities prepared with pictures and/or written words. Talk to the learner about this several times prior to the group time using environmental and

visual cues. Follow steps which gradually draw the learner into the group. Steps might include:

- "Watching" music group. Learner is in the same room or area as the group.
- Sitting in chair six feet away from the group, gradually move the chair closer by one or two feet each time; use a tape mark on the floor to indicate where the chair goes. Sitting with the group for two minutes, gradually increase to five, ten, and then fifteen minutes.
- Convey the expectation to the learner by defining the activity. Help the student recognize completion. This can be done by specifying: "We will sing three songs, " "paint one picture, " "listen to one story." Or it can be specified by time; "You need to sit at the table with us for five minutes." Use visual or concrete cues to enable the learner to understand the concepts. Three songs could be shown by three pictures designating the songs.
- Help the learner recognize when the group is finished by telling him with words, "We're finished, now it's time for ____" and by visual means; the book is put away or the picture is hung up and the area cleaned up.
- Plans should be in place to help the learner with difficult behaviors and to determine why the behaviors are occurring. If an interfering behavior occurs, a plan should be in place to help the person through it. Make sure the learner has a chance to complete the group activity once the situation is stabilized. Reinforce and accept attempts.

Associated Objectives:

- Will participate in a small, familiar group activity with peers.
- Will tolerate being in an increased number of group activities.
- Will interact with one or two peers in a structured recreation situation.
- Will choose among several group activities.
- Will become part of an on-going peer group.

Plan for Motivation:

- Plan routines so that when the learner tolerates being in a group, a favored activity or at least a known routine follows.
- Plan group activities of interest that involve strengths. Often movement, structure and order, or visual activities work best. Seldom are verbal activities with no visuals or physical action successful.

Precautions:

- If a learner is beginning a program, be sure he has a chance to feel comfortable and secure in his surroundings before expecting him to be successful in groups.
- Environments may need modification, at least initially.
- Some learners will respond better to activities in defined spaces, such as sitting at a table; activities where people are standing and moving in open spaces may be more difficult.
- The learner must feel safe with peers. The adult may have to do extra teaching so peers will not be aggressive or tease.
- Learners will need support to interact and will need to be taught situation specific rules and cues.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: GROUP INTERACTION
SKILL: PARTICIPATION IN A GROUP
OBJECTIVE: Will participate in a familiar small group activity with sociable peers.

RATIONALE: Persons with autism frequently have problems participating as a member of a group. They often have problems following directions given in a group and may need gradual introduction to group activities.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- If needed, follow steps to meeting objective; "Will tolerate being in a group of sociable peers."
- Do the activity with one-to-one direction; then introduce learner to the group activity.
- Practice peer interaction skills such as taking turns, asking a peer for something, sharing materials, complimenting, negotiating, and waiting in natural situations.

Teaching Procedures:

- Select a group activity that is regularly scheduled. It should be a familiar activity or one the learner can easily follow. These could include: computer games, arts and crafts, noncompetitive sports skills, board games, or exercise group.

- Prepare the learner ahead of time. Define the activity in terms of completion or time: "take three turns, " "hit the ball five times, " or "play for ten minutes." Help the learner recognize when the activity is finished: "You drew three cards. You're all finished."
- During the activity, the adult or peer may need to provide one to one direction and modeling. Use peer models whenever possible. If needed, sociable peers may help direct the student. Be sure the learner knows who she is to model.
- Gradually fade one-to-one assistance and cue the student with gestures or other visual cues to attend and respond to the directions of one group leader or to imitate a selected peer.
- Use visual and environmental cues to help support and maintain success. Verbal cues are sometimes hard to understand and the learner may become dependent on them.

Associated Objectives:

- Will follow simple directions given to a small, familiar group.
- Will increase the number of group activities in which she can successfully participate.
- Will participate in an activity with a group of sociable peers near her age.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the student participates in a group she:

- Enjoys doing what other students do.
- Likes following the set routine.
- Receives group approval for participation.
- Likes what she is doing.
- Succeeds at the activity.

Precautions:

- Be ready to support and desensitize if the student reacts negatively to large, open, undefined space or unstructured activities.
- Be aware of individual frustrators such as loud noises, crowded rooms, background distractions, sudden movement.
- Be aware of individual needs.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION

SKILL: APPROACHING PEOPLE

OBJECTIVE: **Will approach people without touching, stand an arm's length away, then initiate a learned greeting gesture.**

RATIONALE: Individuals with autism who have the desire to interact may cling to ways they have learned when younger. They seldom learn age-appropriate social rules from observation alone. Rules and routines often need to be taught, because they can't understand, adapt, and respond to the array of cues.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- The learner will practice discriminating between familiar people and strangers. He will distinguish who we touch, where we touch, and how we touch. People with autism may have learned to enjoy touching later in life than most children. This pleasure should not be denied, but rather built into appropriate behavior. Asking for hugs, tickles, or back rubs from appropriate people in appropriate places can be taught.

Teaching Procedures:

- Practice standing at appropriate distance when talking, approaching, and waiting.
- Model, demonstrate, cue and explain, for example, say "I need more room, Sue. Please stand back, " when the student is too close. Show how others feel by standing too close, putting hands on. Do this in practice sessions, but make it clear you are role playing. Puppets or videotape might be used to rehearse correct methods.
- Write out the rules as "special talking rules, " for example, "We keep our heads straight when talking to people." Read and discuss. Use pictures and videotape.
- Demonstrate talking with someone. Videotape the demonstration. Playback with the learner. With the rules chart, ask the student to check or star the rules he follows. Verbally prompt as necessary with such questions as, "Are you keeping your hands to yourself?"
- Reward appropriate behavior through immediate attention, points, stars or primary reinforcers at first. Ignore inappropriate behavior or redirect it.

- Use structured conversation times, first with adults, then with a conversational peer. Use a chart with and without videotape. When appropriate, use video to talk about people's positive and negative reactions when a rule is broken, such as "What did Jill do when you touched her neck? She walked away. She didn't want to talk to you anymore."
- Remind the learner about conversational rules during other talking situations. It will help to rehearse for specific situations. For instance, before going to visit someone, ask the learner what he will do: "How close will you stand? What will you do with your hands? What will you do if Frank asks a questions?" Use visual supports for rehearsal and reminders.
- Begin practice in a structured setting, but as the learner becomes successful, quickly expand to naturally occurring settings. A degree of structure may need to be imposed at first, so that the learner remembers his rules, but gradually move to visual cue recognition. This will require everyone working together to use the same cues. Keep practice sessions short at first, then gradually lengthen them.

Associated Objectives:

- Will greet people appropriately.
- Will initiate requests or greetings.
- Will wait for attention.
- Will express liking someone in appropriate ways.
- Will listen to another person talk until that person finishes.
- Will give compliments to others.
- Will offer to share an appropriate food or activity.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the learner approaches people appropriately he:

- Gets positive and appropriate attention and avoids negative reactions.
- Enjoys interactions. Example: "I like talking to you and I like your smile" or "When you keep your hands to yourself I like being with you more."

Precautions:

- Others must model appropriate behavior. Avoid invading an individual's space, grabbing him or using physical assistance without telling him first.

- Avoid friendly touching that may be misunderstood by the person with autism.
- Be careful not to reinforce inappropriate touching by becoming upset when touched.
- People with autism need touching. Be sure they get this by setting appropriate times, places, and persons for touching and stick to the rules; For example, "We hug right before bedtime, or "In our family we hug each other (name and/or picture) to say hello, goodbye or I love you."

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: EXPRESSING FEELINGS
SKILL: IDENTIFYING FEELINGS
OBJECTIVE: **Will identify a variety of feelings of himself and others and apply these in natural situations when they occur with specific cues.**

RATIONALE: Individuals with autism have great difficulty understanding and interpreting emotions. They often see every action as either being "mad" or "happy," with no range in between. Reactions of people vary, experiences are usually confusing, and anxiety is raised during emotional outbursts. The person with autism needs help to apply rules and concreteness to an everchanging, abstract situation.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Allow expression of feelings and encourage appropriate demonstration of feelings, including negative ones.
- In all interactions dealing with feelings, be consistent and clear in expressing and labeling the feeling.

Teaching Procedures:

- Modify the ideas in "T.A. for Tots": terminology of "warm fuzzies, cold pricklies, Feeling Me, Thinking Me, and Bossy Me." Establish that it is O.K. to have feelings and to talk about them. Make posters of the "Me's." Sort pictures of like situations into "Me" groups. Talk about what is happening and how the people feel. Act out these feelings and role play the "Me" situations. Make pricklies and fuzzies and use them in real situations to identify the feelings.
- Take pictures of familiar people exhibiting emotions in varied situations.

- Teach labels as you proceed: Happy, mad, sad, afraid (scared), hurt, gentle, rough, surprised, confused, embarrassed, safe, disappointed, tired, hungry. Use as many and as varied a list as the learner can handle, but don't just give opposites such as happy-sad. Love can be demonstrated in appropriate ways.
- Adults can model emotions in exaggerated ways in structured settings, then take care to label how they are feeling in real situations. For example, "My car won't start and I am really mad" (be mad) or "I'm sad and disappointed that we can't go to the Y-Center today, but it is too icy outside" (be sad).
- Help interpret how their actions make others feel or why others are acting the way they are. For example, "Joe's mad because you gave him a 'cold prickly.' What did you do?" or "Chris is ripping up his work because he made a mistake. How does he feel?"
- The "Why's" are much more difficult to answer and less concrete, but with interpretation and cuing, the student can better understand why he feels like he does.
- Establish set cues to help recognize feelings and for doing something appropriate about them. The student can learn to say, "Leave me alone," "I need to go to my room," or just go to an isolated, safe area when he needs a break. The adult may need to cue at first by "Do you need to take a break?"
- Teach relaxation routines to help define ways to relax and feel better.

Associated Objectives:

- Will verbally or with gestures and actions appropriately express his feelings in real situations with cues.
- Will identify how other people's behavior makes him feel or act with adult cues.

Plan for Motivation: Plan contingencies so that when the student identifies feelings in natural situations he:

- Can make more sense out of the actions of people around him.
- Gains more control of himself and avoids negative reactions of others.
- Receives acceptance of himself and his feelings.

Sample contingency: "Tell Brian how you feel, then he'll know how angry you are." or "When you tell me you're scared with words, then I can make the bike go slower."

Precautions:

- Accept the student's feelings and expressions and avoid correction. Try to acknowledge why the feelings are there. When a student says, "I hate you, " or "I'm going to kill you," he may be mad because he can't go outside. Therefore, the adult can say, "You are mad because you can't go outside." Avoid admonishing the student for the words he used.
- Avoid labeling behavior as bad. Tell the student how it makes you feel, instead.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION
SKILL: RESPECTING OTHERS' NEEDS
OBJECTIVE: **Will respect other people's needs, rights, and desires, when asked.**

RATIONALE: Some of the demands that people with autism make are annoying and interfere with their interaction with others. It becomes necessary for them to learn that other people have rights too and that interruptions and excessive demands from them annoy some people and interfere with interactions.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Develop a lesson on how people's preferences are the same and how they are different. Write and picture the likes and dislikes of familiar people and compare them. Be specific.
- Help the student identify the feelings of himself and others when he does something that bothers others, and when others do something that bothers him. Role play situations; then prompt in real situations. Use video playback.
- Use modeling in other learning sequences.
- Use desensitization procedures to build tolerance.

Teaching Procedures:

- Identify the inappropriate demands the learner makes on others in a way that the student understands. Analyze why, when, and where the behaviors occur. Some of these demands may be:
  "Make Joe stop that."

- "Don't do that."
  Demanding people follow directions such as "Don't talk/sing/sit there."
  "Don't look at me."
  "Move."
  Asking endless questions
- Choose only one or two behaviors to modify at first. For example: The request of "Don't talk" at the dinner table may occur only when you talk to Jerry. Explain, "I like to talk. Jerry and I are having fun. Do you want to talk with us?" If the answer is "No" from the learner he should be told, "O.K. but I have the right to talk." Another example might be: Joe is bouncing the ball in the gym. The person with autism says, "Stop that." You might interpret by saying, "Joe has the right to bounce the ball. You find another place to walk. Help him find an alternative and reinforce him.
- In structured and real situations, discuss people's feelings and what they like to do. "Shawn taps his fingers because he likes the noise. You can ask him to stop, but he might not." Provide alternatives for the other person to do.
- Desensitize the learner to tolerate some of the frustrators or compulsions, to wait, and to overcome fears.
- Discuss things the learner likes to do that may bother other people. Identify when and where or how long the student may do this without bothering others. With learners who are higher functioning work out very concrete negotiations in which the adult agrees to tolerate actions of the student in return for the student tolerating the adult's actions. For example, "You let me read for five minutes without interruption, then I will answer five of your questions." Provide visual supports like a timer.

Associated Objectives:

- Will direct requests to others and accept their answers.
- Will modify demands when others reasonably request him to do so.
- Will follow negotiating procedures in specific situations.
- Will generalize learned skills.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when a learner respects other people's rights he:

- Has positive give and take interactions with adults and peers.
- Realizes people like to be around him more.

- His interests and activities expand.
- He enjoys activities more and is less anxious.

Precautions:

- Expecting too much tolerance with new people or overloading a learner too quickly may bring about aggression or other undesirable behaviors, such as screaming.
- Adults often see this demanding behavior as manipulative and become angry. The reason behind the demands must be considered. Sometimes it is important to honor requests to alleviate anxiety and preserve the dignity of the person.
- For many, social acceptability will be unattainable unless they are firmly and consistently expected not to engage in certain behaviors at times and in places that bother others. To do this they need acceptable outlets and acceptable alternative behaviors that serve the identical purpose for them.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION
SKILL: PLEASANT TOUCHING
OBJECTIVE: **Will use touching, hugging, and cuddling in appropriate ways to interact with others.**

RATIONALE: Often, people with autism may learn to accept, then like hugging and touching later than most children. They tend to use this means long after other people their age have gone on to other ways of interacting. It is important that this contact be encouraged, but at the same time that it be channeled appropriately.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Help the learner engage in pleasant touching experiences as part of a game or play situation.
- Some learners may be fearful about being touched and have a great need to control the situation during touching. They will do best if they are allowed to do all the touching at first, then tell or show the adult how and where he wants to be touched. Accepting the adult/peer initiating touch may come later.

Teaching Procedures:

- Teach certain rules and distinctions: Gentle touch versus rough touch. Practice stroking gently. Discuss what hurts. Stop the interaction when it hurts; roughhousing and tickling for "fun" versus hurting. Distinguish a time and place to wrestle, pillow fight or tickle, and establish set rules for having fun. For example, "We play wrestle on this rug and stop when someone asks to stop." Discuss and decide who can be hugged and where. Clear-cut rules such as "hug relatives, hug at home" are easier to follow. However, a time to sit close and enjoy an activity should be put into the routine, such as at storytime on the couch.
- Cuddling time or relaxation time can be built into the schedule. For some learners who have not experienced pleasant touching when younger, this may be introduced as a structured learning experience. For others, it will already be a pleasant way to interact. Cuddling allows for give and take. This is pleasant before bedtime and should be built into a specific routine. For example: Say, "Let's rub arms, Jake. I'll rub yours and then you rub mine." Smile, accept his efforts. Tell him what feels good. Proceed as both of you feel comfortable, but do not permit hurting. Tell him if something hurts, such as "You pinched my arm and that hurts." Reinforce each session with something pleasant afterwards.
- Consider the customs of each family when teaching appropriate touching and have their full understanding, cooperation, and involvement.

Associated Objectives:

- Will ask familiar people for permission to hug and will accept their answers.
- Will spontaneously kiss and hug family members at appropriate times and places.
- Will give backrubs to friends.
- Will accept backrubs from friends.
- Will give a "High five" as a greeting.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the student touches appropriately he:

- Has a pleasant sensory experience.

- Feels accepted and loved. Example: When you rub my back it makes me feel good. Thanks."

Precautions:

- It seems strange that something has to be taught that comes naturally to many people. Therefore, take care to teach age appropriate behaviors using methods that are accepted by the community and family, while still meeting the individual's emotional and physical needs for touching.
- Clear rules must be taught about who touches whom in order to guard the person from abuse. Social/sexual rules and behaviors will need to be taught as well.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS
SKILL: HANDLING TEASING
OBJECTIVE: Will effectively ignore teasing behavior of peers.

RATIONALE: In order to be with groups of peers without adult support, people with autism may need help interpreting negative behavior of others and knowing how to react effectively.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- The learner needs to have positive experiences with one or more peers before he is exposed to small groups of peers.
- The learner will need advocates and supporters.
- The learner will need experience in identifying teasing.
- The learner will need an alternative concrete activity to engage in in order to "ignore" effectively.

Teaching Procedures:

- Distinguish teasing from non-teasing. Because people with autism often don't understand subtle or sometimes even direct humor, or when someone is being mean except in concrete incidents, teasing is very abstract and difficult to understand. A literal translation is usually made of all communication and interaction. For example: The person with autism asks "What time is it?" and the reply is a teasing comment, "It's way past your bedtime." Or the person with autism drops something and someone teases by grabbing it and running

away or hiding it. Or the person with autism says something and someone says, "Shut up, you are so dumb."

- Practice in structured settings with questions like, "Is that teasing?" "Is it real?" "Is it mean?" "How does it make you feel?" Use videotape for feedback and practice.
- Practice strategies for dealing with teasing. The most effective is ignoring. Usually this has to be taught in a situation specific manner, such as to walk away from Matt when he calls you a baby. In order to learn what is meant by ignoring and how effective it can be, people with autism should practice its use in structured situations in which they are reinforced for their efforts. Provide strong support and reinforcements as this skill is practiced. A back-up system of obtaining support from adults or peers should be in place for those instances that go beyond the learner's tolerance level.
- Gradually practice the skill and expand on the concept in natural settings. Peer models and a support group will be very helpful. The person with autism can begin to see that teasing stops when he ignores it, but will continue if everyone enjoys seeing him get upset.

Associated Objectives:

- Will tell an aggressive peer to stop and/or move away or will ask for help.
- Will express his feelings to a close peer or sibling who bothers him, such as saying, "I don't like that!"
- Will engage in an alternate learned activity when feeling upset.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the student ignores teasing he:

- Sees that others stop teasing.
- Feels more safe and comfortable in a group. Sample contingency: "When you ignore teasing, people stop teasing you." or "When you do something else, you don't notice the teasing as much."

Precautions:

- This is a tough behavior to learn, and will require much interpretation and support.
- Peers may need instruction to help them reinforce the people with autism.

- If the person with autism becomes sophisticated, he can learn to make remarks that may stop the teasing, but this is a complex and difficult situation to master and the outcome is quite unpredictable.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTIONS
SKILL: REINFORCING FRIENDLY BEHAVIOR
OBJECTIVE: Will effectively reinforce friendly behavior of peers and adults.

RATIONALE: People often avoid others with whom they might otherwise interact because of behaviors interpreted as indifferent or rude. The person with autism usually lacks the awareness of how his comments and behaviors affect others. Learning to respond to friendly social bids is a necessity in maintaining ongoing interactions.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Follow steps to help the learner become familiar with sociable peers.
- Help the learner interact with sociable peers.
- For some learners it may be best to define this objective in smaller steps such as responding to an invitation or responding to a compliment.
- Choice-making will need to be taught in various situations.

Teaching Procedures:

- Identify friendly behaviors of others that are liked by listing or picturing them:
  - Lisa gives you a present.
  - Jane asks you to go swimming.
  - Jim asks you to eat lunch with him.
  - Jerry says you play a terrific game of basketball.
  - Mrs. Lynch says she likes your new shirt.
  - Butch offers to help you skate.
- Discuss how the learner can respond to show others that he appreciates the invitation or statement.
- Practice these responses. "I'm sorry, I can't go today." "Thanks," "Yes," smiling, or pointing to a communication board picture. Practice the behavior that should follow the remarks.

- Practice reversing roles. Adults and sociable peers should be included in these practice sessions. Video can be used for feedback.
- Immediately before a situation in which peers are likely to show friendly behavior, rehearse possible responses.
- In natural settings the learner may need some cues or interpretations. For example: "That was nice of Jane to ask you. You have a choice of going with Jane or staying here." Present the choice in a way that the person understands.

Associated Objectives:

- Will initiate friendly behavior such as complimenting, asking to go somewhere, or helping one familiar person.
- Will initiate one friendly behavior to several people.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the student reinforces friendly behavior he:

- Enjoys having others respond positively to him.
- Realizes he is included more often. Example: "When you are friendly like that to Butch, he thinks you're great" or "If you answer Jane, she will ask you again."Precautions:
- Adults can only provide so much reinforcement for this kind of behavior; eventually peers will need to provide the reinforcement.

Precautions:

- People with autism, like others, need the option of refusing invitations. If refusal occurs too often, the reason behind it must be analyzed. Does he lack a skill, is he overloaded, does he need more support, is he afraid to alter his schedule, does he need more information or has he failed at this before? Then this reason needs to be addressed before the learner can accept an invitation or be expected to respond in a friendly way.
- The learner will need to feel safe and comfortable with his surroundings and people around him before he can progress in this objective.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS
SKILL: MAKING FRIENDS
OBJECTIVE: **Will use four basic skills necessary to have a friendship with a sociable peer close in age.**

RATIONALE: People with autism are frequently isolated from peers. They may want to interact with a sociable peer but may not have the skills to do so. Therefore it is necessary to teach specific behaviors that are part of being friendly to others so that peers will want to respond and include the person.

Modifications & Lead-up Activities:

- Help the learner practice social interaction skills in group lessons prior to or simultaneously while developing a friendship.
- Help the learner practice these skills with a sibling before trying them with a less predictable peer.
- Identify one skill at a time to learn and generalize.

Teaching Procedures:

- Locate one or two sociable, mature peers near the person's age who are interested in getting to know the individual.
- Provide needed information and preparation for peers.
- Initially the adult will help plan get-togethers and activities that will be fun, on a regular basis. Get togethers may be in someone's home, in a community recreation center or club, or lounge area. At first activities should be in a familiar place. Later, when everyone feels comfortable with each other, activities may be planned in public recreation places such as bowling alleys, skating rinks, shopping malls or restaurants. As much as possible, have everyone participate in planning the get- togethers in person or over the phone.
- An adult will need to provide support and feedback. In a friendship situation, the learner may need regular private talks with the adult to discuss feelings and how her behavior affects her friends and others around her. The peer may need encouragement to express herself clearly to the learner.
- The learner should practice skills for being a friend prior to the get-together. Practice and apply one skill before each get- together utilizing role-playing, videotape, or tape recorder. The following are examples of skills which may be practiced:

Greeting the peer and responding to peer greeting.
Using a conversational opening such as, "How are you doing?"
Giving a compliment, such as, "I like your shirt," and responding to compliments.
Offering personal information in conversation, like "Guess what I did on Friday?"

Responding to a peer's invitation to join in an activity.
Inviting a peer to join in an activity.
Responding to a peer's question.
Expressing enjoyment of activity, for example, "This is fun."
Asking peer to do something together at a later time.
Giving something to a friend.
Making something for a friend.
Sending a letter to a friend.
Calling a friend on the phone.
Participating in negotiations such as where to go eat.
Offering to share and accepting refusal.
Waiting for the peer.

- The skill should be able to fit naturally into the get-together. Initially, the adult may need to cue the learner to use the skill. Example: "Remember what you were going to ask Joan?" or "Remember what we practiced?"
- As soon as possible, fade adult cues and presence. Adult should remain available to provide support when asked and to "debrief" learner and peer afterwards, when needed.

Associated Objectives

- Will practice and apply social skills needed to interact positively with a peer in a community recreation group.
- Will practice and apply social skills needed to interact positively with peers in a non-academic regular school class.
- Will initiate and generalize the friendship skills to appropriate people and situations. .

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the learner uses friendship skills he:

- Gains acceptance and companionship.
- Engages in positive exchanges. Example: "If you make cookies for Josh, he will know you like him." or "If you say something nice to Ellen, she knows you are her friend.

Precautions:

- In supporting the person with autism and peers, the adult must take care not to create a situation where the interaction is carried out through the adult rather than directly among learner and peers. It requires much adult awareness and sensitivity to know how much support is needed for student and peers to feel successful, and when to step back and let their relationship develop naturally.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION
SKILL: GIVING ANOTHER PERSON TIME AND SPACE.
OBJECTIVE: **Will accept regular times he has person's full attention and accept times to do something else and leave others alone for ____ minutes.**

RATIONAL: Verbal people with autism often don't monitor their talking and don't sense when they can talk and when others do not wish to talk to them. They can be very demanding, asking endless questions. Non-verbal people with autism can also invade others space and private time through actions.

Modifications and Lead-up Activities:

- Help the student practice occupying himself with structured activities, gradually increasing the time he can engage in these independently.
- When the learner has a repertoire of independent activities redirect him to these activities when others request individual time.

Teaching procedures:

- Adult will cue student with, "I'm busy now, be quiet until I'm finished," or "I'm busy - do _____ for ____ minutes." Set the timer or refer to the clock. This explanation can be accompanied by gestures such as fingers to mouth for quiet, or hand up for stop, or with other visual cues. Since people with autism have problems with gestures, these may have to be specifically taught. However, these cues can then replace the explanations.
- Teaching a learner what "being quiet" means may be necessary. If the time he waits is short and he is sitting near you, it may be very difficult for him to refrain from talking anyway. Use of a timer to desig-

nate quiet time is sometimes helpful. State to everyone: "It's quiet time. No noises or talking." Remember to use visual reminders. Start with thirty seconds and build up the time. Always reinforce on completion. Learning this can be fun.

- Give the learner a suggestion of something else to do or build other activities into the daily schedule.
- With a very talkative learner it is helpful to give advanced warning saying "I will answer two more questions then you must be quiet for two minutes." Teach waiting or set specific times to ask questions.
- Make sure you remember to seek the learner out at the specified time or when you are finished and give him undivided attention. "Let's talk now. Thank you for waiting."
- It may also be necessary to specify a waiting place or waiting strategy if a particular student becomes anxious waiting. Always use the same directive. "Wait on the couch" and/or "Look at your comic book."
- Gradually expand the time you expect a student to wait, but provide some help in deciding when something is urgent.

Associated Objectives:

- Will wait __ minutes for attention with cues.
- Will entertain himself for ___ minutes.
- Will appropriately seek attention and instruction.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the learner follows directions to leave others alone he:

- Gets positive attention.
- Is proud of his self control and ability to do something while waiting.
- Knows when he will receive "Quality" time from others. Example: "When I finish reading the newspaper, we'll play your game." or "When you leave me alone, it lets me finish faster."

Precautions:

- Adults all too often forget the need of the learner and do not get back to him in the specified time. This objective applies to all those interacting with persons with autism, but should not be abused or overused.
- An alternative response should be in place when the student does not do as requested. For instance, restate "Remember you are wait-

ing. Let's try again." Reset the timer and say, "Do ____ for ____ minutes then we'll talk." Use visuals. Do not scold or engage in an explanation.

GOAL: INCREASE INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
SKILL AREA: SOCIAL INTERACTION
SKILL: UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVE OF OTHERS
OBJECTIVE: Will negotiate choices with one or more peers with supports.

RATIONALE: Many people with autism are not able to listen to another person's point of view and persist in expressing their own desires, expecting others to do as they wish. This lack of ability to compromise causes friends and relatives to stay away from them at times.

Modification and Lead-up Activities:

- Teach choice-making skills.
- Provide the learner experiences in community settings.
- Teach appropriate refusal behavior.
- Teach turn-taking.

Teaching Procedures:

- One strategy may be to count how many people want a certain choice until the choice is narrowed. Another strategy may be to rotate the decision maker or have a decision-maker designated by the day.
- Present choices visually, either in writing or with pictures .
- Write people's names under each possibility then go through a specific strategy to reach a decision,or place a pictures under each person's name.
- The person with autism then needs to decide whether to go with the group decision or not participate.
- Teach what refusing to go with the group means in concrete terms by offering the alternative.
- With a highly verbal person it may be possible to teach a sequence of conversational exchanges. Example: Ask where a friend wants to go. Ask the friend if that is okay. If friend says, "No", then do X. This would take much practice. It might also be possible to teach the

person to use a strategy using visual means, so he or she becomes the negotiator.

Associated Objectives:

- Will ask another person what he likes or where she'd like to go.
- Will offer to share with another and accept the answer.
- Will leave a person alone when asked.
- Will accept the choice of another, even when not his choice.

Plan for Motivation: Plan activities so that when the learner uses negation he:

- Enjoys social recognition and enjoyment from agreeing with group decisions.
- Enjoys having his own choices accepted by the group.
- Gets to use negotiation.

Precautions:

- This is a very difficult skill and will need practice and support across environments and people for a very long time. It is the beginning of realizing other people's perspective.

Summary

These detailed objectives comprise a small sample to give the reader ideas for designing personalized social interaction objectives. Continual assessment and adjustments are needed to ensure progress and success. Remember that social interaction is very complex for all individuals; but for people with autism it is impossible to be successful without planned teaching strategies. Because learning and practicing these skills relies on structured social group teaching throughout a person's life, as well as reliable feedback and support from peers, these particular skills are seldom taught systematically and are relegated to chance learning. This omission is a mistake and should be reconsidered. For people with autism, learning functional social skills and behaviors may be the most important things they learn. The learning can only be accomplished through real situations, not through discussion or reading. Therefore, include social interaction objectives, be creative and specific when teaching, and individualize for each person with autism and each situation. Have fun teaching and interacting.